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HORACE THE DUALITY

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Horace is a duality. Manifold and varied as were his experiences—at home and abroad, in peace and in war, among various classes—they were nevertheless mainly of two kinds, and there are two Horaces who reflect them. There is a Horace of ordinary Italian manners and ideals, and a Horace of the higher culture of Rome and Athens; a more natural Horace, simple and direct, and a less natural Horace, clothed upon with the artificialities of life in the capital; an unconventional and a conventional Horace.

At bottom, this duality is the reflection of the twofold experience of Horace as the provincial country boy of low degree and as the successful literary man in the city. Like most men of perfected culture who are of rustic origin, Horace was more or less separable. The impressions received from Venusia and its simple population of hard-working, plain-speaking folk within and without the walls, from the roaring Aufidus and the landscape of Apulia, from the freedman father's common-sense instruction as he walked about in companionable and affectionate intercourse with his son, never faded from Horace's mind. The life of the city was superimposed upon the life of the country, but never covered it, to say nothing of displacing it. It was a garment put on and off, which sometimes hid, but never for long, the original clothing of simplicity.

Nor was its wearer altogether insincere when he put it on—or suffered it to be put on. As in most dualities which are not consciously assumed, both Horaces were genuine. There is something of the chameleon in every man. When Davus, under license of the Saturnalia, reproaches his master for praying for the country while he is at Rome, and extolling the city when he is in the country—

> Romae rus optas; absentem rusticus urbem
> Tollis ad astra levis—

it is not mere discontent in Horace which affords him a basis for attack. The poet loved both city and country.

And yet, whatever his liking for the city and its artificialities, his real nature called for the country and its simplicity. It is the Horace of Venusia and the Sabines who is the more genuine. Criticism has occasionally detected the note of affectation in some of the more formal compositions addressed to Augustus and his household; but the most captious critic will hesitate to bring such a charge against the odes which celebrate the life of the fields and hamlets of Italy and the prowess of its citizen soldiers of time gone by, or against the mellow epistles and lyrics in which the poet philosophizes upon the spectacle of human life.

I

The real Horace is seen with greatest distinctness when he sings of the beauty and fruitfulness of Italy. It is no land of the imagination which he visualizes for us, nor yet a Homericized or a Theocritean Italy, but the Italy of his own time, the Italy of his own birth and experience, and the Italy of today. We may still see the features he loved best—the oak and the ilex, the pine and the poplar, the funereal cypress; the bright flower of the too-short-lived rose, the sweet-scented bed of violets, the olive groves of Venafrum, and the purple-clustered vine of varied autumn wedded to the elm—that most beautiful of sights and most sympathetic of figures; the long-horned and grey-flanked cattle, grazing under the peaceful sky of the Campagna, or enjoying holiday freedom in the meadow—the same cattle that Carducci saw—

> In the grave sweetness of whose tranquil eyes
> Of emerald, broad and still reflected, dwells
> All the divine green silence of the plain;

the sterile rust on the corn, the blazing heat of dog-days, when not a breath stirs as the languid shepherd leads his flock to the banks of the stream; the sunny pastures of Calabria, the yellow Tiber at flood, the rushing Anio, and the deep eddying of Liris' taciturn stream; the secluded valleys of the Apennines, the snow-covered fields on the Alban hills; the mead sparkling with hoar-frost at the approach of spring, autumn rearing from the fields her head decorous with mellow fruits, and golden abundance from full horn pouring forth her treasures upon the land—

> Aurea fruges
> Italiae pleno defundit Copia cornu.

It is real Italy which Horace cuts on his cameos: real cities, real landscape, real products, real men.

In its wholesomeness and convincing reality, Horace's art is like the sculpture, the painting, and the architecture of his own time. The portraiture on the painted walls of Pompeii and in the bust of a Caecilius Jucundus; the garlands of flowers, fruits, and ribbons painted and sculptured in the Augustan Age, and needing only a freshening of the ancient colors to make them live; the stately Roman rulers of the world advancing in dignified procession on the Altar of Peace; the massive buildings supported by arch and vault—Horace's poetry is no less robust and full-bodied and natural, and Roman, than these.

II

Horace's art is not less vital in its presentation of the life of Italy than of her scenery. Where else may be seen so many vivid incidental pictures of men at their daily occupations of work or play? In satire and epistle, it is true, this is to be expected, though there are satirists and letter-writers who have not transferred the colors of life to their canvas; but the lyrics, too, are kaleidoscopic with scenes from the daily life of men. We are given glimpses into the career of the merchant and sailor; we see the sportsman chasing the boar, the countryman setting snares for the greedy thrush, the serenader under the casement, the plowman at his ingleside; the anxious mother at the window on the cliff, never taking her eye from the curved shore; the husbandman passing industrious days on his own hillside, tilling his acres with his own oxen—

> Condit quisque diem collibus in suis,
> Et vitem viduas ducit ad arbores;

the young men of the Sabellian mountain hamlet carrying bundles of fagots along the rocky slopes; the rustic religious holiday and its games; the sun-browned wife making ready the evening meal against the coming of the tired peasant husband—all the quaint and quiet life of the countryside.

The page is often golden with homely precept or tale—the country mouse and the town mouse, the fox and the weasel, the rustic and the river, the stag and the horse—precept and tale for all time natural to farmer folk. Not even the most formal and dignified of the odes are without the mellow charm of Italian landscape and the genial warmth of Italian life. The vineyard and the hailstorm, the Campus on election day, the vale stirred by zephyrs, the fearless soldier, cheerful amid hardship under the open sky, the restless Adriatic, the Bantine headlands and low-lying Forentum, the babe in the wood of Voltur, the hill-towns near Rome, the contrast between the craven soldier of Crassus and the stern patriotism of Regulus—the inaugural odes would be but barren and cold without these, to say nothing of the outburst against the domestic degradation of the time, full of color and heat and picturesqueness:

Non his iuventus orta parentibus
Infecit aequor sanguine Punico
  Pyrrhumque et ingentem cecidit
    Antiochum Hannibalemque dirum,

Sed rusticorum mascula militum
Proles, Sabellis docta ligonibus
  Versare glaebas et severae
    Matris ad arbitrium recisos

Portare fustis, sol ubi montium
Mutaret umbras et iuga demeret
  Bobus fatigatis, amicum
    Tempus agens abeunte curru.

III

Again, the more genuine Horace appears in the poet who sings of the religion of the countryside. He knows, indeed, the gods of Greece and the East—Venus of Cythera and Paphos, of Eryx and Cnidus; Mercury, benefactor of men; Diana, lady of the mountain and the glade; Delian Apollo, who laves his loosened locks in the pure dew of Castalia; Juno, consort and sister of fulminating Jove. He is impressed by the glittering pomp of the procession as it winds its way up the Capitoline steep. He subscribes to incipient emperor worship. In all this he acquiesces without question, though he may himself be

Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens.

Religion is, and always has been, a necessary part of the mechanism of the state, and one of the proprieties.

But the more genuine Horace is not in the odes addressed to the great Olympic deities. The only one of them in which he prays with really fervent heart—when he petitions the great god of healing and poetry for what is most precious to him:

> Frui paratis et valido mihi
> Latoe, dones, et, precor, integra
> Cum mente nec turpem senectam
> Degere nec cithara carentem—

stands alone among all the odes to the great gods of the state. It is not the prayer of the city-bred formalist; it reflects the heart of the Horace of country breeding and sympathies.

For the faith which sets the poet aglow we must go into the fields and hamlets of Italy, among the householders who were the descendants of the long line of Italian forefathers that had worshiped the same gods at the same altars—not gods of yesterday, imported from Greece and Egypt and glittering with display, but the simple gods of farm and fold native to Italian soil. The simplicity of the worshiper, the picturesqueness of the worship, the purity and genuineness of it all as compared with what his worldly wisdom told him of the hearts of the city classes—all made powerful appeal to him, whatever his own conception of the logic of it.

Horace may be suspected of skepticism of Jupiter's thunderbolt, and he may pass the jest on the Epicurean indifference of the gods; but when he does so, it is of mythological, literary, unreal gods he is thinking. For the religion of the country he entertains only the kindliest regard. The images that rise in his mind at the mention of religion pure and undefiled are not the gaudy spectacles of the marbled streets of the capital, but incense rising in autumn from the ancient altar on the homestead; the feast of the Terminalia with its slain lamb; libations and flowers on the clear waters of some ancestral spring; the simple hearth in the farmhouse, the board crowned with the *salinum*, legacy of generations, and the pious offering of crackling meal and salt to the little gods crowned with rosemary and myrtle; the altar beneath the pine to the maiden goddess; Faunus, in the humor of wooing, roaming the sunny farmfields; Priapus, and Silvanus, guardian of boundaries; and, most of all, and typifying all, the faith of rustic Phidyle, with clean hands and a pure heart raising palms to heaven at the new of the moon, and petitioning for the full-hanging vine, thrifty fields of corn, and unblemished lambs. Of the religious life represented by these he is no more tempted to make light than he is tempted to delineate the Italian peasant after the manner of a Maupassant—as an amusing animal, with just enough of the human about him to be ludicrous.

IV

And finally, the more genuine Horace is seen in the unconventional wisdom which fills satire and epistle, and sparkles from the odes. For all his having been a student of formal philosophy in the groves of the Academy, for all his professed faith in the efficaciousness of philosophy for rich and poor, and old and young, and for all his inclination, under the spur of the natural human fondness for system, to adopt the philosophy of one of the schools, he is a consistent follower of neither Stoicism nor Epicureanism. His half-humorous confession of wavering allegiance is only a reflection of the mutations of a mind open to the appeal of both:

> Ac, ne forte roges quo me duce, quo lare tuter,
> Nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri
> Quo me cumque rapit tempestas deferor hospes.
> Nunc agilis fio et mersor civilibus undis,
> Virtutis verae custos rigidusque satelles,
> Nunc in Aristippi furtim praecepta relabor,
> Et mihi res, non me rebus subiungere conor.

This is more than mere humor. Both systems attracted Horace by their virtues, and both repelled him by their limitations. In all his satire on Stoicism, his animadversion is always directed against the extremes of the school—its doctrine of the equality of sins, and its ridiculous paradoxes: every wise man is a king, every fool a slave, pain is no evil, etc. Against the Stoic virtues he never utters a word. If the Epicureans escape with censure less direct, it is because Epicureanism as an intellectual system was less open to attack: its frank materialism had at least the merit of making a brave show of logic; but its extremists—extremists who put into practice a base interpretation of the doctrine of seizing upon the moment—stand condemned at every turn by the poet's insistence upon self-control and the golden mean.

Horace is both Stoic and Epicurean, or neither—or either; for the character of philosophy depends upon definition of terms, and Epicureanism with Horace's definitions of pleasure and duty differed little from Stoicism. In theory, he was more of the Epicurean; in practice, more of the Stoic. His philosophy occupies ground between both, or rather, ground common to both. It admits of no name; it is not a system; it owes its resemblances to either Stoicism or Epicureanism more to his own nature than to his familiarity with them, great as that was.

The foundations of Horace's philosophy were laid before he ever heard of the schools—by association with his father and the people of Venusia, and with the middle class at Rome. Under the clarifying influence of study and reading in Athens, the stress of experience in the field, and long contemplation of life in the large in the capital of an empire, it crystallized into a philosophy of life —*Lebensweisheit.* What he read in books did not all remain for him book philosophy; what was in tune with his nature was assimilated, and became philosophy in action—philosophy which was really the guide of life. His faith in it is unfeigned:

> Sic mihi tarda fluunt ingrataque tempora quae spem
> Consiliumque morantur agendi gnaviter id quod
> Aeque neglectum pueris senibusque nocebit . . . .
> Invidus, iracundus, iners, vinosus, amator,
> Nemo adeo ferus est ut non mitescere possit,
> Si modo culturae patientem commodet aurem.

The occasional phraseology of the schools which he employs is for the most part convenient dress for truth discovered through vital experience; or it is literary ornament. The humorous and not wholly unsatiric allusion in the letter to Albius Tibullus—

> Me pinguem et nitidum bene curata cute vises
> Cum ridere voles, Epicuri de grege porcum—

is about as much a confession of Stoicism as of Epicureanism.

V

Among the results of Horace's urban experience, it is wholly natural that none should be more prominent than the influence of Hellenism upon his work. His debt to Greek literature is great. The metrical conveyance of most of his lyrics, many of the lyrics themselves, a wealth of literary ornament, much of the richness of his intellectual furnishing, and no small part of his sureness of taste and execution—all these Greece gave him, as she has given them to many others.

But much of this is only a clothing upon of the real Horace by the artificial Horace of the literary coterie. There is the Hellenic Horace who experiments with Greek meter, draws heavily on Greek geography and Greek mythology, employs Greek nomenclature, stages Greek scenery, engages in labored imitation of the Homeric simile (always labored when it is not Homeric), or frankly translates and adapts Greek lyrics; and there is the more genuine Horace who employs the native trochee and iamb and the long-since naturalized hexameter, and lets Italian gods and heroes speak from Italian scenes, or in his own person discourses homely Italian wisdom, and is Greek in nothing but form even when his conveyance is sapphic or alcaic.

The real Horace is an Italian poet, and a Roman. He is Italian by birth and experience, Italian in person, habit, and temperament, Italian in his love of Italy and her life, and in his clear vision of her natural charms. He is Roman in his pride in Rome's past and present, in his faith in her destiny, and in the intimate relation of his art to life. His schoolmistress was Greece; the mother from whom he derived his powers was Italy; and his immediate inspiration was Rome.

To call Horace Greek rather than Roman would be to be blinded to the essential by the presence of graceful form and a partial and after all not very great identity of matter. It would be as little reasonable as to call a Roman arcade Greek because it displays column and architrave and a facing of marble. What makes Roman architecture stand is Italian concrete and the vault. Horace is Greek as Milton is Roman or Hebrew. To study him as a duality is to discover his real unity.